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AUTHOR Jones, Timothy B.; Essien-Barrett, Barbara; Gill, Peggy B.
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ABSTRACT

A multi-case study was used in the self-study of three programs within an academic department of a mid-sized Southern university. Multi-case methodology as a form of self-study encourages a process of self-renewal and programmatic change as it defines an active stakeholder role. The participants in the three case studies were university faculty and administrators, current graduate students, graduates of the secondary teacher preparation program, and members of program advisory groups. Data collection techniques included surveys, focus groups, and the multi-case method itself. A grounded theory approach was used to analyze the data for each study. During the study, the frame of self-study emerged within the research process, resulting in a significant shift in the epistemological paradigm and attitudes of the faculty related to scholarly activities. This shift has further resulted in an evolutionary process of ongoing self-renewal within the case study analysis. The academic unit's faculty has substantially increased its commitment to the inquiry process at several levels. The faculty has become a living artifact in, and as a result of, the method. The evolutionary process of self-study, self-renewal, and mindful inquiry provided the opportunity for the faculty to engage in critical self-examination. (Contains 16 references.) (SLD)

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Timothy B. Jones

Stephen F. Austin State University

Barbara Essien-Barrett

Stephen F. Austin State University

Peggy B. Gill

Stephen F. Austin State University

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Methodological Considerations for an Evolving Model of Institutional Research

> Wisdom not steeped in methods is bondage.
> Wisdom steeped in method is freedom.
> Method not steeped in wisdom is bondage.
> Method steeped in wisdom is freedom.
> Tsongkapa, *The Principal Teachings of Buddhism*

The threads of self-study, self-renewal, and mindful inquiry are woven together within multicase methodology to provide an evolving picture of a department in transition. The emerging patterns of coherence, engagement, and authenticity have contributed to the developing scholar-practitioner culture. Multicase methodology is an holistic, naturalistic, interpretive approach to institutional research which also encompasses a transformational process. Feedback loops allow review and redesign of existing programs, while feed-forward loops inform the change process and connect faculty to a continuous process of self-renewal.

Review of the Literature

> Any social arrangement that remains vitally social, or vitally shared, is educative to those who participate in it. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*

In the fall of 1993, a distinguished group of higher education and industry leaders, the Wingspread Group, issued a 160-page report entitled An American Imperative: Higher Expectations for Higher Education. The group opened its

report with a disconcerting statement about the effectiveness of higher education in America: "A disturbing and dangerous mismatch exists between what American society needs of higher education and what it is receiving" (Seymour, 1995, p. x). Over the past decade much has been written about institutional effectiveness and the need for new directions in academic programs. Seymour (1995) suggests that "the chasm between what we do in higher education and what society needs must be bridged" (p. xi). In an environment where external demands abound, serious internal examination is essential (Wergin, 1987).

Institutions of higher education must change the way they look at themselves. Current literature substantiates the need for a greater emphasis on internal monitoring and self-examination that is closely linked to organizational improvement and self-renewal (Wergin & Braskamp,1987; Haworth and Conrad, 1997; Kells, 1995).

Sirotnik (1987) suggests that the process of rigorous self-examination is indeed the process of renewal itself. At its best, self-study becomes "a process of critical inquiry that monitors the health of the [institution], while at the same time legitimating and providing a forum for critical discourse and action by those who work in the [institution]"

(Sirotnik, 1987, p. 42). As the self-study process becomes deeply ingrained in the culture of the institution, self-renewal is imminent and new patterns of development begin to evolve within the culture of the organization.

Critical inquiry, when used as process for studying institutional effectiveness is centered on learning; its outcome is the production of critical knowledge. According to Sirotnik, "critical knowledge is the consciousness raising and enlightenment gained through reflection on, and critique of, existing knowledge through the dialectical process embedded in the questions we ask" (1987, p. 51).

The ultimate goal of self-study through critical inquiry is increasing the effectiveness of the organization while ensuring the growth and development of those involved in the process (Seymour,1995). When critical inquiry becomes an integral part of the institution's way of doing things, the practitioner learns to function as a researcher and a scholar (Schon,1983). The process itself becomes a source of ongoing self-renewal for the individuals as well as the organization.

Self-study through critical inquiry provides colleges and universities a way of looking at themselves for the purposes of growth and improvement. Ultimately, the self-study process must involve everyone. It must become a part

of the institution's conscious and deliberate pursuit of excellence (Wergin, 1987).

Developing and sustaining high-quality programs requires those who have a stake in academic programs to engage in an on-going process of self-renewal through organizational learning. "Where we have traditionally acknowledged the need for representation in change, it has tended to be a selected representation often tempered by politics and expediency" (Jenlink, 1996, p.75). Quality in higher education demands the collective intelligence, engagement, and commitment of many people who mutually invest in their own and others' learning (Haworth & Conrad, 1997). Wergin (1987)suggests that without genuine investment in the process by those who have the most to gain or lose, improvement- any real change- is unlikely. (Wergin, 1987).

When guided by critical inquiry, the self-study process cultivates new, fresh ideas, from different perspectives and unique angles (Seymour, 1995). Through self-study the constructive potential for individual and collective improvement can be realized (Sirotnik, 1987).

In higher education, self-study through critical inquiry may be our best hope for examining institutional

effectiveness while contributing to the development of practitioners who are committed to scholarly activity.

Methodology

The multicase method uses cross case comparison and analysis of individual case studies of academic programs as a means of studying both effectiveness and quality within the institutional research paradigm (Haworth & Conrad, 1997; Stake, 1995) and the development of a scholar-practitioner culture. It is a meta-analysis process that seeks to identify: 1) how patterns emerge within and across cases, 2) what cross patterns emerge, and 3) the meaning of the cross patterns that emerge. As a method of self-study it situates the research team in the role of self-critical examiner through a process of mindful inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Multicase methodology as a form of self-study encourages a process of self-renewal and programmatic change while defining an active stakeholder role.

Participants. Stakeholder voice is a key component in the multicase research process (Haworth & Conrad, 1997). Institutional administrators, program administrators, students, alumni, and employers of alumni are included as categories of participants. The participant in the three case studies that form the units of analysis for this multicase study included: a) university faculty and

administrators, b) current students in the newly formed doctoral program, c) past graduates from the secondary teacher preparation program and the mid-management (K-12 administrators) preparation program, and c) members of advisory groups which included superintendents and principals. The setting for the research was an academic department in a mid-size (approximately 12,400 students) regional university located in the south. A case study was developed for each of the three programs within the department.

Data Collection. Data collection techniques included survey research, focus group interviews, (Kreuger, 1994; Morgan, 1988) and multicase method. Data sources for the three cases included a) artifacts collected from each faculty as they engaged in the redesign of their respective academic program area; b) discourse and written communication representing the articulation and dissemination of policy and procedure designed to facilitate the renewal of the department in concert with the redesign of the academic programs; c) transcripts of audio recorded focus group interviews of various participants; d) survey data collected from past graduates of two programs (secondary and mid-management) and current students of the

newly formed doctoral program; and e) faculty and interview data.

Data Analysis. A grounded theory approach (Straus, & Corbin, 1990) was used to analyze data collected for each study. As the first level of analysis, the intent of the case study of each program was to provide an ongoing and evolving study of the program. Emergent themes were assimilated within the research framework of patterns of development when moving toward a scholar-practitioner culture. An integrative or synthetic approach (Patton, 1990) to data analysis was used to create a holistic profile of emergent patterns. Data were sorted to address the procedural, structural, curricular, philosophical and political elements of culture as either constraining or developing a scholar-practitioner culture.

The second level of analysis, multicase technique (Greene & David, 1981) was used to conduct a cross case analysis. The issues of coherence and authenticity provided the initial framework within which to assess the emergent themes provided by the three case studies. The research team examined the perspectives shared by participants to determine which factors were consistent within and/or common across each program to determine coherence, while the

engagement of participants over time, to what extent, and with what intent provided the indicators for authenticity.

With the combined purpose of studying program effectiveness and quality, and the development of a scholar-practitioner culture, another level of data analysis examined the research process itself. Engagement and authenticity were reframed within the paradigm of changing culture and self renewal. Level of engagement in the inquiry process, reflexivity as a characteristic of the process, and commitment to self-critical examination provided a contextualization of the data. The actions performed within the inquiry process, as well as the actions resulting from engagement in the inquiry process, provided a holistic profile of emergent patterns within a department in transition.

Results and Implications: Reflections

Case study and cross case analysis methods applied to institutional effectiveness studies produce numerous outcomes, some of which are not typically foreseen during the design phase of the research. To truly appreciate the continuous impact the process has on an academic unit, early reflection at this beginning stage seems to be appropriate.

During this study, unforeseen phenomenon occurred as the frame of self-study emerged within the research process. For example, the self-study emergence resulted in a

significant shift in the epistemological paradigm and attitude of the faculty relating to scholarly activities, particularly research, and professional focus. This shift has further resulted in an evolutionary process of on-going self-renewal within the case study analysis.

The full impact and longevity of this apparent shift is not yet known, as the academic unit is still early in the process. The emerging patterns of behavior are clear, however, encompassing a shift from the set patterns in place prior to the research process. The on-going, evolutionary nature of the self-study which has resulted from faculty engagement in the institutional research project, is paralleled with the scholar-practitioner model and philosophy adopted by the department as a structure and framework for its academic programs. This transformation in academic policy transferred into the practice of the department itself and influenced the shift in the epistemological paradigm of the faculty. It would seem that mindful inquiry results in scholarly practice. It may be too early to tell the level of scholarly activity as a result of the process, but clearly the focus on scholarly activities is evident.

Specifically, the emerging framework has resulted in the academic unit substantially increasing the faculty's commitment to the inquiry process at several levels. The

engagement in the research process for the institutional effectiveness study resulted in faculty, research assistants and students engaging in scholarly activities, influencing change in the paradigm within the academic unit. The process facilitated the change in belief, attitude, and practice.

Therefore, the faculty became a living artifact in and as a result of the method. The process itself brought faculty, students, and administration together for the inquiry, and the scholarly and self-renewing attitudes of those participants changed into what seems to be an on-going and evolutionary process. This would support the idea that the process realigned the departmental culture toward an emphasis on research, the pursuit of developing a scholar-practitioner profile, and a strong commitment to the new emerging culture. Transformation is with the process and not the product. At this stage of analysis, it is clear that the department is in a state of becoming, and not a state of being.

Conclusion

Using multicase methodology to examine the impact of programmatic changes resulted in a deeper understanding of the place of institutional research in institutional renewal. This evolutionary process of self-study, self-renewal, and mindful inquiry provided the opportunity for a faculty to begin engaging in critical self-examination.

Critical knowledge brought forth from historical contexts, stakeholder voice, and commitment to the inquiry process resulted in both programmatic changes and an epistemological paradigm shift toward a scholar practitioner culture.

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